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RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4862
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TAGS: PHUM KPAQ EAID OIIP PREL CE

SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: Maldivian Media on Ambassador Blake Presenting Credentials and Port Call of USS DUBUQUE.

¶11. (U) Summary: Coverage in the Maldivian media of Ambassador Blake's presentation of credentials and the visit by USS DUBUQUE following Exercise COCONUT GROVE 06 with the U.S. Marines was widespread in both print and television and generally positive. Independent papers aligned with the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) used the U.S. visits to call attention to their upcoming political rally on November 10. Print media is primarily in the Dhivehi language with English language coverage provided by bilingual websites associated with the print versions. Ambassador Blake's meeting with President Gayoom and subsequent press conference received factual coverage in both the two independent and two of three government papers, including photographs. TV Maldives aired a 23 second segment in Dhivehi covering Ambassador Blake's conversation with President Gayoom and a 7 second segment on the visit of USS DUBUQUE. End Summary.

¶12. (U) Government controlled dailies provided straightforward coverage of the Ambassador's visit. Reporters from the pro-opposition independent press tried to link the U.S. visits with a planned November 10 opposition rally.

¶13. (U) The following are the headlines and leads that appeared in government and independent papers after Ambassador Blake presented his credentials on October 30 and held a press conference the following day:

-- New ambassadors present Credentials -- Miadhu (Government)
October 31, 2006

"The new US Ambassador stressed the close friendly relations between the Maldives and the United States. Welcoming the President's democratic reform agenda, Ambassador Blake wished him success in this important endeavour."

-- MDP to meet US Ambassador today - Dhivehi Observer (Independent)
October 31, 2006

"Official sources in the MDP have confirmed that the American Ambassador to the Maldives, Mr. Robert O. Blake, will be meeting with MDP leadership today, who is currently visiting the Maldives. A senior official of the MDP said the party will express ongoing concerns about lawlessness in the Maldives and the extent of oppression in the country."

-- "USA: November 10 "Can Proceed" - Minivan News (Independent)
November 1, 2006

"The new American Ambassador to the Maldives, Robert O. Blake, said

in a press conference yesterday that he would support the Maldivian Democratic Party's (MDP) November 10 assembly to accelerate constitutional change, if the opposition acts in accordance with the current constitution."

-- American Ambassador Meets Press -- Miadhu (Government) November 1, 2006

"The new ambassador from the United States to the Maldives met with the Maldivian media yesterday."

¶4. (U) Coverage of the USS DUBUQUE visit to the Male atoll was positive and helped to dispel rumors that the Marines had come as a show of support or to assist in the suppression of the November 10 MDP rally. Sample headlines and leads follow:

-- Visiting U.S. ship did not have any political alignment - Minivan News (Independent) Dhivehi, July 12, 2006

"Maldives government used the noble humanitarian assistance goals of the US government for its own political agendas."

-- U.S. ship here on assistance mission will leave tomorrow - Aafathis News (Government) Dhivehi, October 31, 2006

"The US Navy ship which came to assist the government of the Maldives will depart tomorrow."

BLAKE